

# 2010

## Cedar-Riverside Parks and the Mississippi River



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## Table of Contents

1	Executive Summary .....	4
2	Introduction .....	9
2.1	Problem Statement .....	9
2.2	Research Goals .....	9
3	Overview .....	9
3.1	Cedar-Riverside Neighborhood.....	9
3.2	Green-Space Value.....	10
3.3	Community Resource.....	11
3.4	Major Landholders .....	11
3.4.1	Minneapolis Parks.....	11
3.4.2	The University of Minnesota and Fairview-University Hospital .....	16
3.5	Riverfront Governance.....	17
3.5.1	The Mississippi River Corridor Critical Area (MRCCA).....	17
3.5.2	The Mississippi National River and Recreation Area (MNRRA) .....	20
4	Challenges .....	23
4.1	Geographical .....	23
4.1.1	Fragmented Land Ownership.....	23
4.1.2	Vague Land Ownership .....	23
4.1.3	Parks Divided by Institutions.....	23
4.1.4	Limited Bluffs to Riverfront Accessibility .....	24
4.1.5	Few Connections to Greater Neighborhood .....	24
4.1.6	Isolated Connections between Cedar-Riverside and Minneapolis.....	24
4.1.7	Public Safety Concerns .....	25
4.2	Organizational & Governance.....	25
4.2.1	Prominent NRP and WBCC Divide.....	25
4.2.2	Separate WBCC Taskforces .....	26
4.2.3	Difficult to Identify & Coordinate Stakeholders .....	26
4.2.4	Uncertain MRCCA Reform .....	26
4.3	Financial .....	27
4.3.1	Declining MPRB Funding .....	27
4.3.2	Underfunded NPS Priorities .....	27
4.3.3	Underutilized Alternative Resources .....	27
4.4	Community .....	28

4.4.1	Low Awareness of Resources .....	28
4.4.2	Practically No Awareness of MRCCA & MNRRA Designations.....	28
5	Recommendations .....	28
5.1	Create a Clear Riverfront Ownership Map .....	29
5.2	Provide Park Signage and Information .....	29
5.3	Further Involvement in University of Minnesota Master Planning .....	29
5.4	Follow “Big Projects” .....	29
5.5	Designate a WBCC Point Person .....	30
5.6	Build Community Awareness through Youth Programs.....	30
5.7	Engage All Levels of Riverfront Governance.....	30
5.8	Become Active in MRCCA Reform .....	30
5.9	Strengthen Current Partnerships and Create New Ones.....	31
5.10	Utilize Inexpensive Resources.....	31
5.11	Seek New Sources of Project Funding .....	31
6	Bibliography .....	32

# 1 Executive Summary

## **PROBLEM STATEMENT**

Within the Cedar-Riverside neighborhood there exist a number of green-space locations, each with its own historical, ecological, recreational, and existence value. Each green-space has differing needs, functions, legacies, stakeholders, plans, and futures. From this diversity comes the perception of each green-space as a separate, disconnected entity from the others. And from this perception, multiple neighborhood plans have arisen on an individual, as-needed basis for the preservation, enhancement, and restoration of each resource. The West Bank Community Coalition (WBCC), recognizing the hereunto fractured management approach, regards the creation of a comprehensive riverfront plan as a key step toward a unified and strong riverfront.

## **RESEARCH GOALS**

Recognizing the difficulties of working with a multitude of stakeholders and property owners in the Mississippi River riverfront area, the WBCC received grant funding from the Center for Urban and Regional Affairs (CURA) at the Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs to:

- Assemble plans from the individual parks and land use policies of property along the riverfront to create a document to inform the general public.
- Determine possible strategies for a comprehensive preservation plan based upon this research.
- Create recommendations for WBCC to engage partners for the development and implementation of a comprehensive plan.

This report serves as the culmination of this effort, providing background information, historical perspective, challenges faced, and recommendations toward successful creation of a comprehensive riverfront plan by the WBCC.

## **OVERVIEW**

The land within Cedar-Riverside and along the Mississippi River is valued by residents for two primary qualities: 1) As a unique ecological resource and 2) As a community resource for a variety of active uses. Since the early days of milling in Minneapolis, people have valued the river and adjoining land as a historic, cultural, and recreational resource in addition to its economic potential. The Cedar-Riverside riverfront – and extending up to nearby St. Anthony Falls and down to Fort Snelling - is the only stretch along the entire Mississippi River considered a true gorge. With steep slopes and dramatic drop-offs, the bluffs provide unparalleled views of the river, animal habitat, and the surrounding city. Areas of the riverfront also serve as a critical ecological component of the Mississippi River Valley, containing one of the few locations above Downtown St. Paul with Bedrock Bluff Prairie. Bedrock prairie is just one of the ecological features that make the Mississippi River a primary migratory route for birds in North America. Additionally, many animal species permanently reside in the natural areas remaining on top of the bluff and along the waterfront.

The Minneapolis Parks and Recreation Board (MPRB), the University of Minnesota, and Fairview-University Hospital control and maintain a substantial swath of land directly adjacent to the river in the central region of the Cedar-Riverside neighborhood. Owned by an assortment of individuals, other smaller bits of riverfront land are clustered above the northern and southern bluffs of the neighborhood. Within the Cedar-Riverside neighborhood, the MPRB owns Currie Park, Murphy Square, Bluff Street Park, Riverside Park, West River Parkway, and Svea Triangle. This report focuses specifically on the three parks with immediate proximity to the river: Riverside Park, Bluff Street Park, and West River Parkway.

Two key components of governance oversee the use of the Mississippi River and the land directly adjacent to it. At the state level, The Mississippi River Corridor Critical Area helps preserve and protect the historic, cultural, and aesthetic values and the natural systems of the river. Federally, the same Critical Area is designated the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area by the National Park Service to lead the way in helping the nation and region understand, protect, and enhance a great river of the world.

The Minnesota State Legislature enacted the Critical Areas Act in 1973 to assist in the protection and preservation of natural systems and their historic, cultural, and aesthetic values. A 72-mile metropolitan stretch of the Mississippi River and its 54,000-acre adjacent corridor through the Twin Cities was designated a State Critical Area in 1976 by Executive Order. A permanent designation was approved by the Metropolitan Council that same year, thereby permanently establishing the Mississippi River Corridor Critical Area (MRCCA). The MRCCA extends from the cities of Ramsey and Dayton in the north metro to the southern boundary of Dakota County. Within the urban diversified district – the classification within which Cedar-Riverside falls - it is expected that land and water be used and developed to maintain the diverse mix of commercial, industrial, residential, and public spaces on land and transportation along the river. Historical sites and areas are to be protected as well as natural scenic and environmental resources. Public access to the river and enjoyment thereupon are to be expanded. As long as compatible with these goals, new commercial, residential, industrial, and other uses may be permitted.

In 1988, the U.S. Congress designated the area within MRCCA a National Park, calling it the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area (MNRRA). MNRRA is defined by the exact same boundaries as the preceding MRCCA. The MNRRA program area aims to convene various river partners and stakeholder groups in developing collaborative and sustainable strategies to ensure that the river remains healthy and vibrant. The Comprehensive Management Plan, created by the National Park Service (NPS), actively encourages voluntary adoption of guidelines that are more protective than the Critical Area executive order standards. These guidelines aim to coordinate resource protection, visitor use, and development activities within the Park and to promote a higher level of protection consistency among affected communities.

## **CHALLENGES**

After surveying the various landowners along the river and the governance structures that are currently in place, some challenges become apparent. When the WBCC works with partners to further preserve, protect, enhance, and utilize the unique resources within their neighborhood, it

is important for community members to understand the existing challenges and how they may limit or guide what actions the neighborhood can undertake.

- **Fragmented Land Ownership** The MPRB, the University of Minnesota, and Fairview-University Hospital own substantial tracts along the central riverfront, while other areas contain smaller, more fragmented private owners. Owners and stakeholders have varied interests, perspectives, land uses, ownership qualities, and financial and time resources.
- **Vague Land Ownership** Many landowners make a clear geographical picture difficult to visualize. Existing property line ambiguity leads to further confusion for the WBCC.
- **Parks Divided by Institutions** Bluff Street Park and Riverside Parks are isolated from one another by two major institutions between them. This major accessibility hindrance between both parks leads to residents primarily using one park or the other and not recognizing the natural resources available along the entire riverfront.
- **Limited Bluffs to Riverfront Accessibility** Bluffs act as a physical barrier between Bluff Street and Riverside Parks above and West River Parkway below the bluffs. Residents wishing to access West River Parkway have very few, deteriorating options from the neighborhoods above.
- **Few Connections to Greater Neighborhood** Since there are no existing pedestrian or bicycle friendly connections between all of the neighborhood's parks, many residents lack practical, safe options in venturing to non-adjacent parks.
- **Isolated Connections between Cedar-Riverside and Minneapolis** Riverside and Bluff Street Parks are isolated from the larger city. Riverside Park is often only known to the outside community as a park seen from Interstate 94 and as difficult to access. Bluff Street Park is primarily recognized as a natural area shadowed by the 10<sup>th</sup> Avenue Bridge.
- **Public Safety Concerns** Many residents are concerned, often well-founded, by the presence of crime in the parks. Since Bluff Street and Riverside Parks are so isolated and do not have constant levels of users and passersby, they are a prime location for undesirable activity.
- **Prominent NRP and WBCC Divide** The Neighborhood Revitalization Program (NRP) and WBCC largely operate separately. Governance issues brought to the attention of the WBCC lack the money for action. NRP has funding to undertake needed projects, but often lacks the authority, networks, and responsibility that the NRP possesses.
- **Separate WBCC Taskforces** Two distinct WBCC taskforces reflect upon issues pertaining independently to Bluff Street Park and Riverside Park. Little overlap is seen between the two, meaning that issues that appear to be unique to each park are often not discovered to also be of concern to the other.
- **Difficult to Identify & Coordinate Stakeholders** A large and diverse stakeholder group is very difficult to gather to discuss important issues pertaining to the river, making future planning difficult. This will continue to be a problem if the WBCC doesn't create a nexus of knowledge that understands who does what, when, and where within this complexity.
- **Uncertain MRCCA Reform** The Minnesota Legislature is considering reform as a result of the 2008 Mississippi River Corridor Critical Area Report to the Minnesota Legislature. In this dynamic environment, the development of new governance principles will complicate the creation of a comprehensive riverfront plan by the WBCC.
- **Declining MPRB Funding** The MPRB has seen substantial reductions in funding, with more anticipated into the future. It will be difficult for the MPRB to provide additional

services or undertake new projects in conjunction with the WBCC along the riverfront, especially considering higher priorities along the riverfront in North Minneapolis.

- **Underfunded NPS Priorities** The Park's local government grant program remains unfunded by Congress, removing a critical financial resource and enticement for communities to incorporate Tier II planning and management standards.
- **Underutilized Alternative Resources** The community contains many human resources which are underutilized. There have been few efforts to date, with some exceptions, to utilize the volunteering and educational efforts of the University of Minnesota and neighborhood youth in increasing what projects can be accomplished along the riverfront.
- **Low Awareness of Resources** Community awareness of riverfront parks and resources is very limited. Residents within Cedar-Riverside are often acutely aware of the location and attributes of their closest park, but have little broader knowledge of the others.
- **Practically No Awareness of MRCCA & MNRRA Designations** Many in the community do not recognize the MRCCA and MNRRA designations, let alone understand their significance. A comprehensive riverfront plan will be challenged to communicate these statuses to an otherwise largely unaware public.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

As the WBCC develops a comprehensive riverfront plan, some specific actions should be taken to better inform the plan, as well as lay the ground work for carrying out intentions contained within. Though some of these recommendations are directly actionable and concise, others are more general in nature with open-ended means and outcomes. However, all recommendations aim to achieve the WBCC's primary goal for the riverfront area: the development of a comprehensive riverfront plan that would maximize the impact that the Cedar-Riverside neighborhood can have on the preservation, restoration, and enhancement of the valuable natural resources on and near the river.

- **Create a Clear Riverfront Ownership Map** By developing a map which delineates one plot of land from another, all stakeholders can be clearly identified. Once acknowledged, the WBCC will likely have greater success in bringing together the collective group.
- **Provide Park Signage and Information** The WBCC should work closely with the MPRB to create and install new kiosks in Bluff Street Park, Riverside Park, and West River Parkway. Kiosks would identify other natural areas along Cedar-Riverside's riverfront and explain on the importance of the area to visitors and users.
- **Further Involvement in University of Minnesota Master Planning** The WBCC should engage the University of Minnesota's Master Plan Steering Committee, Community Partnerships & Development Office, and Capital Planning and Project Management Office. The WBCC should promote paths along the bluffs during future campus planning.
- **Follow "Big Projects"** The WBCC should be active in the Central Corridor LRT's planning, implementation, and construction, advocating for the protection of natural areas. Look for opportunities for synergy, where construction can be guided to enhancement and preservation projects which may otherwise be too large and ambitious.
- **Designate a WBCC Point Person** Designate as single point person for external communications, perhaps at the level of a dedicated staff person. Primarily, this position



would coordinate all of the WBCC's riverfront activities and be responsible for the development of the comprehensive riverfront plan.

- **Build Community Awareness through Youth Programs** New and existing youth programs should strive to provide more programming along the riverfront areas. Children can bring excitement and energy to their families about fun times and meaningful outings they had in WBCC youth programs along the river.
- **Engage All Levels of Riverfront Governance** The WBCC riverfront point person should build relationships with others at all levels of riverfront governance. Outreach targets should be the NPS (MNRRA), the DNR (MRCCA), the City of Minneapolis (Critical Area Plan), the MPRB (Park ownership), and Hennepin County.
- **Become Active in MRCCA Reform** As MRCCA reform matures, the WBCC should stay abreast of all developments and make unique positions known. The WBCC must make sure to “show up” and contribute when the opportunity presents itself. The WBCC must be proactive in engaging local and state elected officials regarding this reform.
- **Strengthen Current Partnerships and Create New Ones** Sustain and enhance work with the MPRB, the City Council, and Friends of the Mississippi. Build lasting ties to the University of Minnesota, Fairview-University Hospital, the River Life program, the NPS, Friends of the Mississippi River, and the Minneapolis Riverfront Corporation.
- **Utilize Inexpensive Resources** The WBCC should build a network of “free” help that provides analysis, technical expertise, and research. Develop relationships with faculty and research centers at the University of Minnesota, the Cedar Humphrey Action for Collaborative Neighborhood Engagement (CHANCE) program, and the NPS's Gopher Ranger program.
- **Seek New Sources of Project Funding** The WBCC should work with the NPS, the Mississippi River Fund, Hennepin County, Legacy Amendment funds, the University of Minnesota and Fairview-Riverside community outreach funding, and research centers at the University of Minnesota to identify funding that is currently unknown.

## 2 Introduction

### 2.1 Problem Statement

Within the Cedar-Riverside neighborhood there exist a number of green-space locations, each with its own historical, ecological, recreational, and existence value. In addition to a variety of city parks with differing stories and amenities, the Mississippi River - running along the neighborhood's border - is a resource and destination unparalleled. Until now, most research conducted on these neighboring green-spaces looked at each parcel of land individually and within the context of its immediate surroundings. Each component of Cedar-Riverside's collective green-space has differing needs, functions, legacies, stakeholders, plans, and futures. From this diversity comes the perception of each green-space as a separate, disconnected entity from the others. And from this perception, multiple neighborhood plans have arisen on an individual, as-needed basis for the preservation, enhancement, and restoration of each resource. Currently, no central plan exists which views all green-spaces as a collective neighborhood resource that requires a comprehensive and strategic management approach. The West Bank Community Coalition (WBCC), recognizing the hereunto fractured management approach, regards the creation of a comprehensive riverfront plan as a key step toward a unified and strong riverfront.

### 2.2 Research Goals

Recognizing the difficulties of working with a multitude of stakeholders and property owners in the Mississippi River riverfront area, the WBCC received grant funding from the Center for Urban and Regional Affairs (CURA) at the Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs to:

- Assemble plans from the individual parks and land use policies of property along the riverfront to create a document to inform the general public.
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## 3 Overview

### 3.1 Cedar-Riverside Neighborhood

The Cedar-Riverside Neighborhood, as defined by the City of Minneapolis, is bordered to the south by Interstate 94, to the west by Interstate 35W, and to the north and east by the Mississippi River.

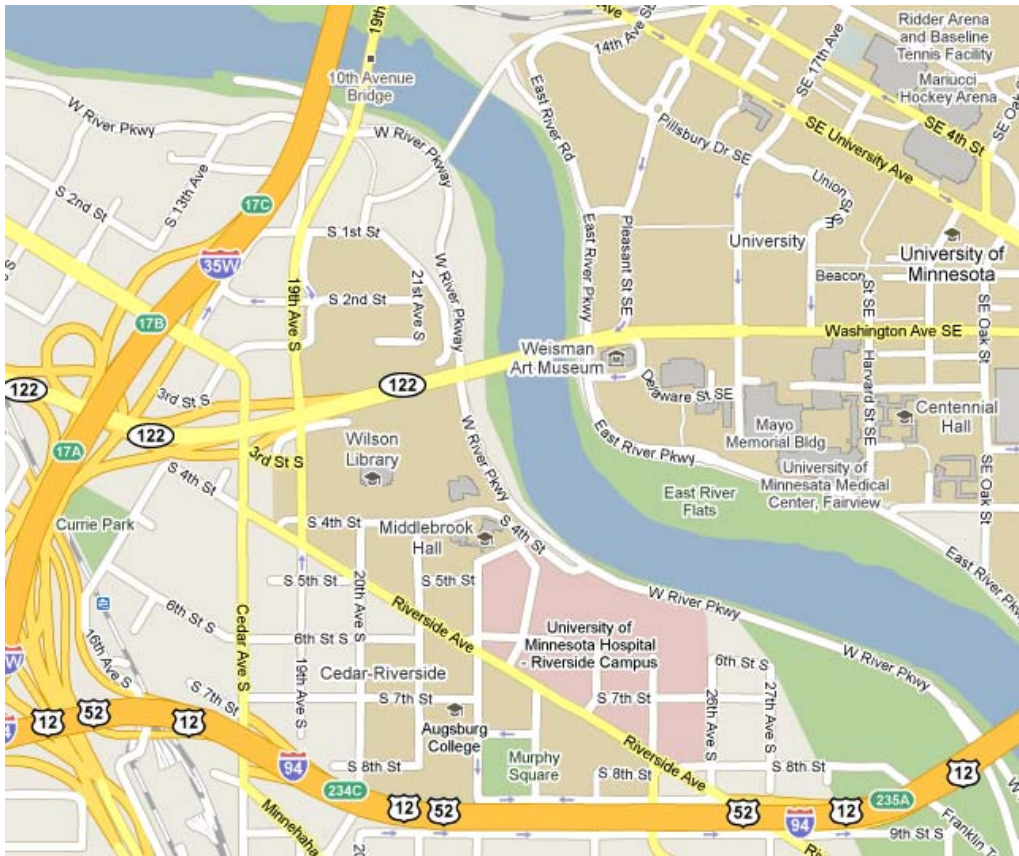


Figure 1 - Cedar-Riverside Neighborhood Boundaries (Courtesy of Google Maps)

The neighborhood exhibits interesting geographical character in that very few access points exist due to interstate boundaries and the Mississippi River. The resulting sense of remoteness for the Cedar-Riverside neighborhood, though located directly adjacent to Downtown Minneapolis, leads to a strong sense of community between the residents. In addition to many residential and commercial spaces, three large institutions are positioned on a large percentage of land. The University of Minnesota, Augsburg College, and Fairview-University Hospital all feature large campuses in the central core of the neighborhood. From the presence of three institutions, a large immigrant population, and historic nature comes a vibrant and diverse neighborhood with a character unlike any other in the Twin Cities.

### 3.2 Green-Space Value

The value of green-space within a neighborhood is hard to quantify. Though it lacks a readily accessible tool for accurate economic valuation, the significance of open space and park land is not lost on many. In particular, the land within Cedar-Riverside and along the Mississippi River is valued for two primary qualities: 1) As a unique ecological resource and 2) As a community resource for a variety of active uses.

The immense value of the land as an ecological resource is often overlooked financially and otherwise, especially when considering the unique natural characteristics along this portion of the Mississippi River. Along the Cedar-Riverside riverfront - extending up to nearby St. Anthony Falls and down to Fort Snelling - is the only stretch along the entire Mississippi River considered

a true gorge. With steep slopes and dramatic drop-offs, the tops of the bluffs provide unparalleled views of the river, animal habitat, and the surrounding city. Certain areas of the riverfront also serve as a critical ecological component of the Mississippi River Valley, containing one of the few locations above Downtown St. Paul with Bedrock Bluff Prairie. Within the state of Minnesota, only 33 bedrock prairies exist, covering an estimated 320 acres. Bedrock prairie is just one of the ecological features along the riverfront in Cedar-Riverside that makes the Mississippi River a primary migratory route for birds in North America. Additionally, many animal species permanently reside in the natural areas remaining on top of the bluff and along the waterfront.

### **3.3 Community Resource**

Since the early days of milling in Minneapolis, people have valued the river and adjoining land as a historic, cultural, and recreational resource in addition to its economic potential. The river itself provides the community with boating, fishing, and swimming opportunities. Along the riverfront, green-spaces provide residents with dedicated areas to walk, hike, run, picnic, gather, participate in sports, sled, and enjoy views. These public spaces build a sense of community within the neighborhood, promote the health of the residents, and build connections between people and the natural environment in an urban area.

The riverfront also provides a means of efficient and enjoyable transportation to the immediate community and other Minnesotans. Though limited on the bluff, trails for biking and walking, as well as parkways for cars, provide a means for transportation to and from other areas of the city while providing vistas vastly different from concrete barriers.

### **3.4 Major Landholders**

A handful of landowners are responsible for the preservation, restoration, and maintenance of the vast majority of land along the riverfront and above the bluffs. Taken together, the Minneapolis Parks and Recreation Board, the University of Minnesota, and Fairview-University Hospital control and maintain a substantial swath of land directly adjacent to the river in the central region of the Cedar-Riverside neighborhood. Owned by an assortment of individuals, other smaller bits of riverfront land are clustered above the northern and southern bluffs of the neighborhood.

#### **3.4.1 Minneapolis Parks**

Recognizing the importance of preserving natural spaces for their ecological value and as a community resource, the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board (MPRB) was created by the Minnesota State Legislature and a vote of Minneapolis residents in 1883. The Cedar-Riverside neighborhood is situated within District 3 and is currently represented by Scott Vreeland. MPRB is governed by nine commissioners, six representing one district each and three at-large. The park system is 6,400 acres in size and encompasses approximately 16% of the land and water area in the city.

Within the Cedar-Riverside neighborhood, MPRB owns Currie Park, Murphy Square, Bluff Street Park, Riverside Park, West River Parkway, and Svea Triangle.

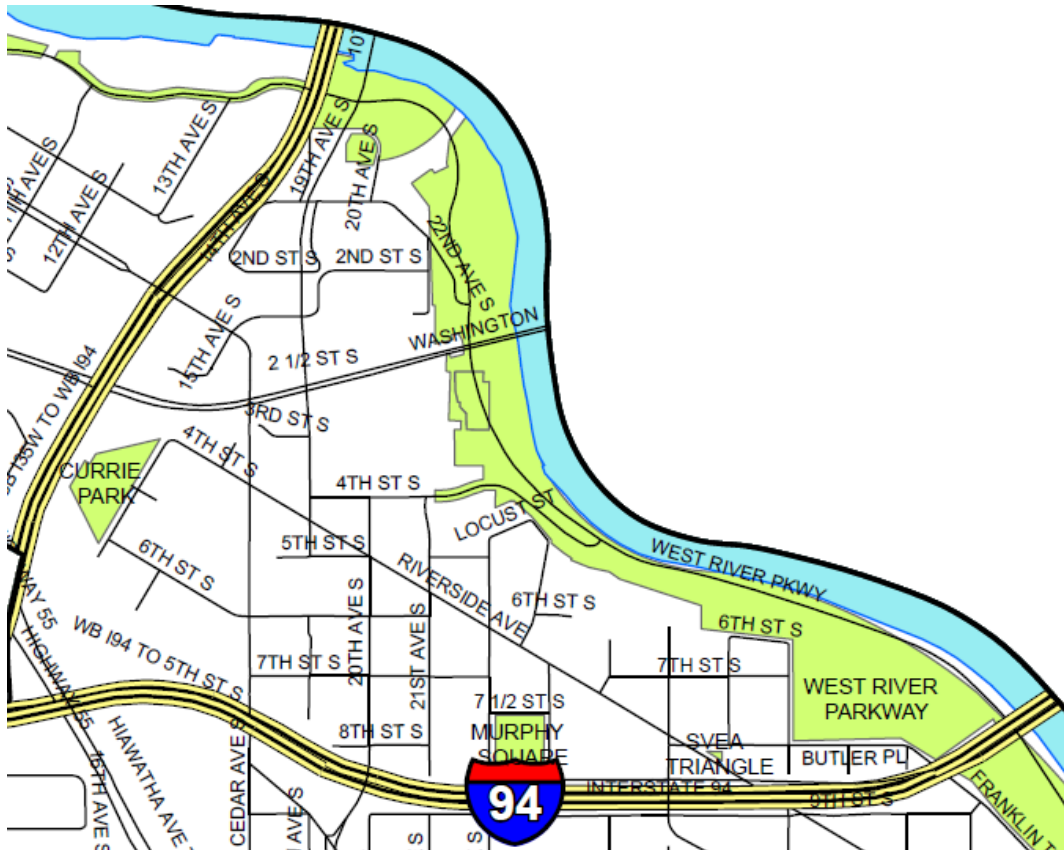


Figure 2 - MPRB Land Holdings (Courtesy of MPRB)

Svea Triangle is a small parcel of land (less than an acre) situated along Riverside Avenue. Due to its small size, it functions primarily as a green easement between a heavily trafficked thoroughfare and the blocks surrounding Riverside Park. Murphy Square is one of Minneapolis' first parks and is laid out as a block-sized green space. Though it is technically a public park, Murphy Square is largely considered a part of the Augsburg College Campus, as it is surrounded on three sides by Augsburg and to the south by Interstate 94. Currie Park is the principal park in the Cedar-Riverside neighborhood and houses the Brian Coyle Community Center. With its location along the western boundary of the neighborhood and proximity to high-density housing, it is an important destination for recreation, leisure, and community activities to much of the immigrant population, especially the nearby Riverside Plaza. This report focuses specifically on the remaining three parks with immediate proximity to the river: Riverside Park, Bluff Street Park, and West River Parkway.

### 3.4.1.1 Riverside Park

Riverside Park marks the southeastern-most point in the Cedar-Riverside neighborhood, encompassing a little over 27 acres. Established shortly after the MPRB's creation in April 1883, the property was chosen for its ideal proximity to the river. Riverside Park has undergone many changes since its inception, reaching its current size after two acres were lost due to the construction of Interstate 94. Geographically, the park consists of an upper bluff and a lower portion of flat land along the river, connected by a small intermediate area. In 1933, the WPA constructed stone steps to connect the upper and lower portions of the park through the intermediate area. A few years later in 1935 a stone bathhouse was built in the upper portion to



accommodate the large numbers of park users visiting its well-known sledding hills, skating, soccer fields, and sport courts. Both the bathhouse and stone steps still exist, though they are well-worn and badly in need of repair. The park has undergone many restorations and re-gradings, with much of this work attempting to remove traces of an old quarry in portions of the site.

Riverside Park saw a series of improvements in 2000 when the upper level of the park was refurbished with new playground equipment, picnic tables, and seating. The basketball court and soccer field were also upgraded. The park currently is receiving a lot of attention from local residents in the surrounding blocks. A WBCC Riverside Park Taskforce has been assembled to address resident concerns over crime, on-site alcohol and drug use, general safety, and deteriorating infrastructure. Additionally, a Riverside park ecological plan is being developed to restore native plant areas and reclaim portions of the park from invasive plant species. Though the park continues to be widely used, many nearby residents have concerns regarding the park's current usage and future.

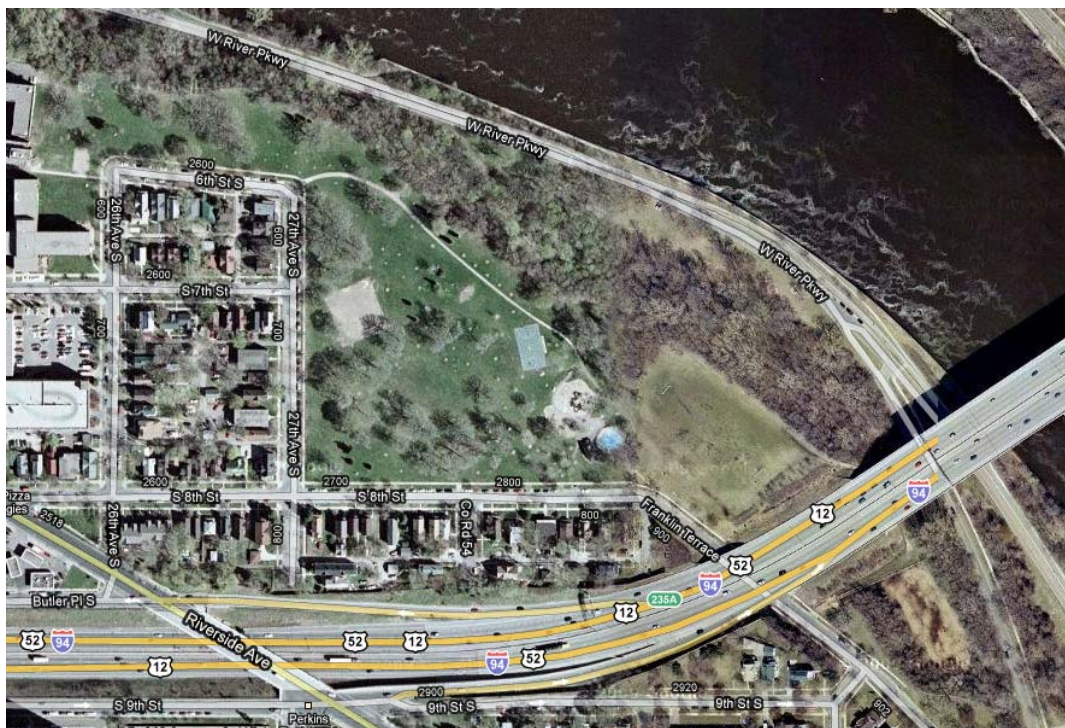


Figure 3 - Riverside Park (Courtesy of Google Maps)

### 3.4.1.2 Bluff Street Park

Bluff Street Park is the newest of city's public parks and is located in the far northwest corner of the Cedar-Riverside neighborhood. For hundreds of years, this land has seen a variety of uses, from industrial site to chemical storage. Additionally, the land was recently used by Flatiron Construction while reconstructing the Interstate 35W Bridge nearby. The MPRB was paid a fee for the contractor's use of the site and the land has now been completely vacated by the contractor and re-graded. The MPRB, in conjunction with substantial efforts by the WBCC and other neighborhood groups, is currently restoring elements of Bluff Street Park with native plant communities. Key features are to include broad meadows and wooded slopes that provide

habitats for insects, birds, and small animals. The plan calls for limited recreation areas in the form of meandering trails through natural areas and small areas of turf with benches and picnic tables. This restoration option for the park, chosen from a list of alternatives, minimizes soil disruption and contamination concerns related to the site's toxic past through minimal disturbance of earth beneath a few feet. Toxic soil has been remediated in most areas of the park, resulting in largely uncontaminated soil above a depth of 10 feet.

Bluff Street Park, as a new and developing park, will be in a state of flux and renewal for some time. With work by MPRB and the community continuing into the coming years, the exact layout and features of this land will likely change given emerging circumstances, budgets, and environmental conditions. The park is especially valued by the nearby community, even in its current under-utilized form, as the land was once sought for development. The Cedar-Riverside neighborhood, particularly residents in close proximity to the park, was vocal about the importance of this land as a natural resource and community feature. It is seen by many as an example of what community action can accomplish with the enlistment of key stakeholders and actors, notably the MPRB.



Figure 4 - Bluff Street Park (Courtesy of Google Maps)

### 3.4.1.3 West River Parkway

West River Parkway is a 205-acre linear park along the west bank of the Mississippi River from Portland Avenue to Minnehaha Park. All of the land directly adjacent to the river in the Cedar-Riverside neighborhood is a small component of the much larger park. The park has undergone enormous size and boundary changes since its initial land purchase in 1902 and has existed in its current form since 1998. At that time, the “Golden Spike” was celebrated as the northern and southern sections of the parkway were first joined with the completion of three separate stages between Portland Avenue South and 4<sup>th</sup> Street. The joining of parkway segments was another chapter in storied history of the parkway dating back to before 1898 when William Folwell, president of MPRB, said in the annual report: “The west river bank is so eminently adapted by situation, contour, and natural vegetation that its loss to the city would be a calamity.”



The histories of West River Parkway and Bluff Street Park are intimately linked. Due to MPRB's desire to complete the parkway by acquisition of land in missing segments, portions of Bluff Street Park above the parkway were purchased in the same land sale as the land directly along the riverfront. Even more recently, Bluff Street Park and West River Parkway have been used extensively in the aftermath of the Interstate 35W collapse. The Bohemian Flats portion of West River Parkway has been used since the collapse in August 2007 to house steel components of the bridge for analysis and as evidence. Though the MPRB has requested that the state immediately remove all components currently placed there, the state has refused on grounds that transportation of the steel to another site would alter evidence in numerous lawsuits relating to the collapse. At this report's writing, Bohemian Flats is closed to users until the steel components are moved by the owner, the Minnesota Department of Transportation.

West River Parkway is immensely valuable to the immediate and greater community alike for its natural resources, proximity to the water, transportation, and recreation features. West River Parkway is a well-traveled by cars who can avoid other areas of congestion while taking in the picturesque views. Individuals also heavily use the pedestrian and bike trails during all seasons. The narrow strip of land provides an ecological buffer between the river and the developed city on top of the adjacent bluffs.



Figure 5 - West River Parkway (Courtesy of Google Maps)



### 3.4.2 The University of Minnesota and Fairview-University Hospital

The University of Minnesota is a substantial landowner very near the riverfront within the Cedar-Riverside neighborhood, as well as within other local neighborhoods. On a much larger scale, the University of Minnesota - Twin Cities Campus is the largest contiguous block of single-owner publicly held developed space within the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area. The campus land of the west bank extends to West River Parkway, but not up to the river. Much of the developed land on the west bank is built right up to the top of the bluff line, often leaving little in terms of easement. The University of Minnesota Twin Cities Master Plan 2009 makes substantial references to the ecological value and campus-life importance of the river, riverfront, and surrounding bluffs to the University. The Plan also lays out future development steps and principles of the University to promote the preservation of these sensitive areas.



Figure 6 - University of Minnesota Property - Shown in grey (Courtesy of the University of Minnesota Twin Cities Campus Master Plan 2009)

Housed within the University of Minnesota, the Institute on the Environment's River Life program works to strengthen connections among the Mississippi River, the University of Minnesota, and the communities and other stakeholders along the river. This multi-collegiate program aims to establish a sustainable urban riverfront and develop sustainable relationships between healthy communities and healthy rivers. Though the River Life program is located at the University, it operates semi-autonomously and is not directly connected to or responsible for riverfront elements of the University's central campus planning.

Directly adjacent to the University's west bank property is the campus of Fairview-University Hospital. Similar to the University, Fairview-University property extends down the bluff to West River Parkway and features development right up to the top of the bluff line. As part of the hospital's current expansion, an ecological study of directly adjacent Riverside Park has been financed to be performed by Ecological Strategies.

### 3.5 Riverfront Governance

Two keys components of governance oversee the use of the Mississippi River and the land directly adjacent to it. At the state level, The Mississippi River Corridor Critical Area helps preserve and protect the historic, cultural, and aesthetic values and the natural systems of the river. Federally, the same Critical Area is designated the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area by the National Park Service to lead the way in helping the nation and region understand, protect, and enhance a great river of the world.

#### 3.5.1 The Mississippi River Corridor Critical Area (MRCCA)

The Minnesota State Legislature enacted the Critical Areas Act in 1973 to assist in the protection and preservation of natural systems and their historic, cultural, and aesthetic values. These areas were seen as of greater than solely local significance and should be governed by additional measures. Governor Wendell Anderson designated a 72-mile metropolitan stretch of the Mississippi River and its 54,000-acre adjacent corridor through the Twin Cities a State Critical Area in 1976 by Executive Order. This was reaffirmed by Governor Albert Quie in 1979 through Executive Order 79-19. A permanent designation was approved by the Metropolitan Council that same year, thereby permanently establishing the Mississippi River Corridor Critical Area (MRCCA). Although originally managed by the Minnesota Environmental Quality Board, management of the MRCCA was transferred to the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) in 1995. The DNR manages in collaboration with corridor municipalities and the Met Council. The intent of the critical area designation for the Mississippi River was, and continues to be:

1. To protect and preserve a unique and valuable resource for the health, safety, and welfare of citizens of the region, state, and nation.
2. To mitigate and prevent irreversible damage to this natural resource.
3. To preserve and enhance for public use the river's historic, cultural, aesthetic, and natural values.
4. To protect and preserve the river as an essential element of transportation, recreational, and sewer and water systems.
5. To protect and preserve the corridor's biological and ecological functions.

The MRCCA extends from the cities of Ramsey and Dayton in the north metro to the southern boundary of Dakota County. The corridor stretches roughly 1,000 feet on each side of the river, though adjusted to follow major landmarks and roads. Within this corridor, Executive Order 79-19 established, based upon natural characteristics and existing development, four distinct district classifications: rural open space, urban diversified, urban development, and urban open space. The riverfront in the Cedar-Riverside neighborhood is classified as an urban diversified district, which extends from 48<sup>th</sup> Avenue North to Franklin Avenue.



Figure 7 - MRCCA Boundaries - Shown shaded (Courtesy of Friends of the Mississippi River)

Within the urban diversified district, it is expected that land and water be used and developed to maintain the diverse mix of commercial, industrial, residential, and public spaces on land and transportation along the river. Within this framework, historical sites and areas are to be protected as well as natural scenic and environmental resources. Public access to the river and enjoyment thereupon are to be expanded. As long as compatible with these goals, new commercial, residential, industrial and other uses may be permitted.

The Critical Area program requires local government units (LGUs) and state and regional agencies to prepare, or modify if already existent, plans and regulations for affected lands within the corridor. LGUs and regional agencies must adopt critical area plans (CAPs) consistent with the Executive Order and update them every two years. The DNR has the authority to approve or deny submitted critical area plans, amendments, and ordinances. Once plans are approved, LGUs may permit development within the corridor, as long as projects are in accordance with the approved plans and the protections listed therein. The DNR and Met Council provide technical assistance to the development of plans and amendments, the writing of ordinances, and the enforcement of the adopted plans. In addition to many other rules, LGUs must inform the DNR area hydrologist at least 30 days before any action is taken on applications or variances for land development within the corridor that requires discretionary action or a public hearing.

The city of Minneapolis first completed its critical area plan, which was subsequently approved, in 1989. The current plan was last revised and approved in 2006. The Minneapolis plan references a separate plan to be completed by the University of Minnesota, though this has not occurred. Minneapolis' CAP makes mention of the land stewardship trend over the last 25 years of returning the river's edge from a heavy industrial heritage to a more natural condition, of which the Cedar-Riverside riverfront is no exception. Among the driving principles of the plan, the Lower Gorge area, within which Cedar-Riverside is located, is intended as an on-water recreation area due to the aesthetically stimulating setting. Additionally, the land within this region is encouraged to include open space for passive and un-programmed recreation, as well as preserves for natural resources. To reach this goal, the conservation and protection of existing

and potential historic, natural, scenic, and recreational resources and uses within the district is necessary. The city will continue to reduce remaining heavy industrial land use within the Lower Gorge, of which the establishment of Bluff Street Park on prior industrial land is a prime example. Directly along the riverfront, public access should be encouraged and protected, by either public ownership of land or negotiated easements with private landowners.

Future development in the urban open space district, including the Lower Gorge and Cedar-Riverside riverfront, shall preserve and enhance the predominant visual feature of trees and bluffs directly adjacent to the river. To this end, walls of tall buildings above or below the bluff should be avoided, with views to and from the river provided by scenic overlooks, parks, and between buildings. The removal of existing natural vegetation within the entire corridor is prohibited when it endangers significant tree or plant communities, especially remnant stands of native trees, prairie grasses, and other plant communities. However, the cutting and removal of noxious exotic plant communities is not prohibited.

Minneapolis' CAP also recognizes the immense importance of connecting natural features within the corridor. In particular, the plan encourages loop trails to connect the upper bluffs with the lower shoreline and trails along West River Parkway. Neighborhoods should be encouraged to access the riverfront by establishing "nodes" and "points of particular interest" at areas with lateral entry to the river. This is to be further accomplished by the city's continued development of bicyclist and pedestrian movement to and along the river. Additionally, MPRB will acquire land for new river corridor parks and trails based upon the MPRB's comprehensive plan when funding is adequately available. Easements for public movement on private land will be negotiated on a case-by-case basis, though public ownership of river corridor park land is preferred.

A report was completed for the Minnesota State Legislature in February 2008 due to citizen concerns that the DNR was not adequately protecting the Corridor. The report examined the overall effectiveness of the Critical Area designation as well as the specific plans and ordinances implemented by the 30 governmental subdivisions (five counties, 21 cities, and four townships) within the Corridor. Hennepin County does not have a CAP, since it maintains no zoning authority or Critical Area regulations. The original Minneapolis CAP relied on existing city regulations and the city therefore did not develop Critical Area ordinances. These existing ordinances were approved as regulations for implementing the plan. Due to difficulties since the original CAP, Minneapolis now has developed an ordinance section with specific Critical Area language, which will be further updated as necessary.

In response to the report, legislators authored a set of Critical Area law reforms with the input of a diverse stakeholder group. Four major changes to existing Mississippi Critical Area law would:

- Authorize rulemaking for the Critical Area by the DNR.
- Provide guidance for establishing new and additional corridor districts outside the original four to better reflect the diversity of features and existing development within the Corridor.
- Provide key term definitions.
- Clarify enforcement responsibilities between the DNR, LGUs, and other state agencies.

General reform principles have gathered a great deal of support from environmental groups and legislators from both parties.

### 3.5.2 The Mississippi National River and Recreation Area (MNRRA)

In 1988, the U.S. Congress designated the area within MRCCA a National Park by Public Law 100-696, calling it the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area (MNRRA). MNRRA is defined by the exact same boundaries, land, and water as the preceding MRCCA, though it in no way replaced the existing state designation.



Figure 8 - MNRRA Boundaries (Courtesy of the NPS)

As defined by Congress, the National Park designation is:

1. To protect, preserve and enhance the significant values of the waters and land of the Mississippi River Corridor within the Saint Paul-Minneapolis Metropolitan Area.
2. To encourage adequate coordination of all governmental programs affecting the land and water resources of the Mississippi River Corridor.
3. To provide a management framework to assist the State of Minnesota and its units of local government in the development and implementation of integrated resource management programs for the Mississippi River Corridor in order to assure orderly public and private development in the area.

Though existing state and local governance mechanisms were already in place to protect, preserve, and enhance the Corridor, Congress found that:

1. The Mississippi River Corridor within the Saint Paul-Minneapolis Metropolitan Area represents a nationally significant historical, recreational, scenic, cultural, natural, economic, and scientific resource.
2. There is a national interest in the preservation, protection and enhancement of these resources for the benefit of the people of the United States.
3. State and local planning efforts along the River Corridor provide a unique foundation for coordinating Federal, State, and local planning and management processes.
4. Existing Federal agency programs lack sufficient coordination and financial participation with State and local planning and regulatory authorities to provide for adequate and comprehensive resource management and economic development consistent with the protection of the Mississippi River Corridor's nationally significant resources, and the public use and enjoyment of the area.
5. The preservation, enhancement, enjoyment, and utilization of the nationally significant resources of the Mississippi River Corridor can be accomplished by a cooperative Federal, State, and local comprehensive planning and management effort.

To oversee the MNRRA in the spirit of cooperation between federal, state, and local officials, a Mississippi River coordinating committee containing 22 members from all levels of government and appointed by the Secretary of the Interior was established. A final Comprehensive Management Plan for the MNRRA was approved in 1995 by the Secretary of the Interior, which created a policy-level framework for the Corridor's management. Responding to the Comprehensive Management Plan, the City of Minneapolis requested and was awarded funding from the National Park Service (NPS) to update its Critical Area policies and ordinances, as well as to consider incorporating voluntary MNRRA guidelines recommended by the NPS.

The Comprehensive Management Plan actively encourages voluntary adoption of guidelines - known as MNRRA Tier II standards - which are more protective than the Critical Area executive order standards. These guidelines aim to coordinate resource protection, visitor use, and development activities within the Corridor and to promote a higher level of protection consistency among affected communities.

Since the NPS owns very little land - only about 50 acres of islands - within the Corridor, its main responsibility is that of educator and facilitator. The MNRRA program area aims to convene various river partners and stakeholder groups in developing collaborative and sustainable strategies to ensure that the river remains healthy and vibrant. NPS can provide expert federal resources to assist local officials in making well-educated land, zoning, and water resource decisions for development and management. Additionally, federal outreach initiatives such as the Junior Ranger program can be introduced into a large urban setting with a population rarely exposed to such opportunities in their immediate vicinity.

To achieve the NPS's goals for the MNRRA, a Strategic Plan was created for fiscal years 2008 through 2012. Within this plan, an overarching theme is the need and desire for the NPS to have a larger presence within the Corridor and have the MNRRA recognized for what it is, an urban

National Park. The NPS has identified a series of Big Ideas in the five-year period to focus on. The NPS will strive to be a leader in getting people to and on the river, in part by creating partner satellite locations within the Corridor to supplement the headquarters at the Science Museum of Minnesota. Balancing resource protection, visitor use, and development is seen as a high priority, with the NPS recognized as an authority on development on the river. Further education is planned by the NPS to edify the community on the significance of historic places within the Corridor, so the community will want to celebrate, protect, and enhance them. A Global Great Rivers Partnership is proposed to bring together multiple stakeholders with the best scientific and economic models to value the natural and cultural resources of the area. The Partnership is envisioned to include the NPS, the University of Minnesota, the Science Museum of Minnesota, the National Science Foundation, and other federal agencies.

To bring the Big Ideas to fruition, goals and strategies are laid out. A new marketing plan in conjunction with more prominent locations and signage would heighten visibility in the minds of nearby residents. Pointing out unique features of the corridor, such as that it is located at the crossroads of three continental biomes (prairie, boreal forest, and hardwood forest), are one example. Three new National Natural Landmarks are to be created within the Park to increase understanding of unique natural resources.

One group identified as lacking meaningful connection to the river, its story, and history is the immigrant population, which is especially prominent in the Cedar-Riverside neighborhood. To engage this group and others, the NPS foresees providing experiences for people on and near the river to build a stronger community bond. This can be accomplished by further identifying and developing satellite visitor sites at key locations and expanding the Park's K-12 education programs, such as the Big River Journey and other Ranger and volunteer-staffed recreational activities.

The organizational strategies for the NPS to focus on over the five year period are meant to guide the NPS toward their larger goals. An important funding initiative within the Park is the Mississippi River Fund, created by the National Park Foundation in 2002. The financial resources provided by the Fund are to build capacity for programming excellence within the Park which would otherwise be unobtainable. Additionally, the Fund's strategic plan identifies ways in which it can assist the Park in building community connections, advocacy, and public relations. Another capacity building strategy is to better utilize technology to serve the Park's visitors, students, government officials, and community members. Infrastructure is to be better solidified by developing a Facilities Master Plan of key educational, visitor, recreational, and administrative assets.

Perhaps the most important organizational strategy of the NPS is to create a brand and visual identity for the Park to help citizens better understand and appreciate this unique national treasure and the NPS's relationship to it. The report clearly points out that few residents within the metropolitan area, and even the neighborhoods within the Park's borders, know that they live, work, commute, and play within a unit of the NPS. In addition to a comprehensive, multi-year marketing plan, the NPS would like to create a new name and identity for the Park, though a name change would require federal legislation.



## 4 Challenges

After surveying the various landowners along the river and the governance structures that are currently in place, some challenges become apparent. When the WBCC works with partners to further preserve, protect, enhance, and utilize the unique resources within their neighborhood, it is important for community members to understand the existing challenges and how they may limit or guide what actions the neighborhood can undertake.

### 4.1 Geographical

As described previously, the Cedar-Riverside neighborhood is a uniquely situated community within a large urban center. Large institutions, land forms, and transportation routes within the neighborhood provide challenges to the WBCC in building a comprehensive identity for the natural resources available to the community along the Mississippi River.

#### 4.1.1 Fragmented Land Ownership

Directly adjacent to the Mississippi River, a number of large landowners dominate. The MPRB, the University of Minnesota, and Fairview-University Hospital own substantial tracts, mostly concentrated along the central riverfront of the neighborhood. Though these landowners are easy to identify and bring to the table, the northwest and southeast areas contain smaller, more fragmented private owners. The northwest corner features a large residential tower (Riverview Tower), a grouping of townhomes, and other fragmented, underutilized pieces of land. The southeast corner features a few buildings owned by St. Catherine University and a large number of small residential lots clustered around Riverside Park. A challenge to any WBCC comprehensive plan is that many owners and stakeholders in the Corridor have varied interests, perspectives, land uses, ownership qualities, and financial and time resources. Though these qualities certainly enhance diversity, it can be difficult to reach consensus on specific issues or even general concepts.

#### 4.1.2 Vague Land Ownership

A large quantity of landowners makes a clear geographical picture difficult to visualize. Upon investigation, no map was found that clearly delineates property lines and rights. During meetings of local groups, it became apparent that confusion often existed on who owned what land and where boundaries existed. With a landscape along the river that often has abrupt elevation changes, visualizing boundaries becomes more difficult when thinking in three dimensions. It is also unclear to many whether the University of Minnesota and Fairview-University Hospital owned the land up to the top of the bluffs or down to the edge of West River Parkway. This ambiguity often leads to further confusion for the WBCC and community, even amongst the most active residents.

#### 4.1.3 Parks Divided by Institutions

Bluff Street Park and Riverside Park are parks of differing pasts, resources, and amenities. The community values these differences and feels they could be better utilized by neighborhood residents. For instance, residents wanting to play basketball or soccer in Riverside Park may wish to take a nature hike along the trails in Bluff Street Park later in the day. Unfortunately, these parks are isolated from one another by two major institutions between them. It is then more likely that residents will use one park or the other, since moving between the two requires transit by car, on foot, or by bike along busy existing transportation routes that are not a direct linear



link. Anyone attempting to remain near the top of the bluff line while traveling between the parks will find that limited, largely concrete connections exist on the University of Minnesota West Bank and no connections exist through the Fairview-University Hospital campus. This major accessibility hindrance between both parks leads to residents primarily using one park or the other and not recognizing the natural resources available to them along the entire riverfront.

#### **4.1.4 Limited Bluffs to Riverfront Accessibility**

West River Parkway is a long, linear park that is continuous through the entire neighborhood, unlike Bluff Street and Riverside Parks. However, bluffs act as a physical barrier between all three parks. A resident wishing to access West River Parkway has very few options from the neighborhood. These access points are by trails in Bluff Street Park, 22<sup>nd</sup> Avenue South nearby, South 4<sup>th</sup> Street on the south border of the University of Minnesota, and aged and severely deteriorating stairs in Riverside Park. These four points are extremely limiting to anyone seeking access to the riverfront, both those wanting access from the two above-bluff parks and those coming from the neighborhood proper. This is yet another geographical barrier between the individual, fragmented resources of the neighborhood which are difficult to utilize as a whole.

#### **4.1.5 Few Connections to Greater Neighborhood**

The mere existence of the riverfront and adjacent natural areas as a neighborhood boundary makes their utilization by the whole community geographically difficult since many residents are not in near proximity. The addition of other barriers, such as large institutions and the busy thoroughfares of Cedar and Riverside Avenues further exasperate this. It is apparent that most residents most use and value the natural areas in close proximity to them, as was often evident in community meetings. This is entirely understandable since other natural green-spaces are often “out of sight, out of mind” and do not invoke the same concern and sense of ownership that an area directly next to a residence can. Since there are no existing pedestrian or bicycle friendly connections between all of the neighborhood’s parks, many residents lack practical options in venturing to non-adjacent parks. This is especially relevant to the river and area below the bluff, as a very small number of residents are in proximity. Thus, those areas are often used more by residents outside the Cedar-Riverside neighborhood who make a trip just for those particular areas and attributes.

#### **4.1.6 Isolated Connections between Cedar-Riverside and Minneapolis**

With the final road connection between the lower gorge and the central riverfront along West River Parkway in recent years, the areas beneath the bluffs and along the river have become much more accessible to the larger metropolitan community. The Parkway is a common commuting route for downtown workers, sightseers, joggers, and bikers. However, Riverside and Bluff Street Parks remain isolated. For instance, Riverside Park is often only known to the outside community as a park seen from Interstate 94, but few would know how to access it. Likewise, Bluff Street Park is primarily recognizable as a natural area in the shadows of the 10<sup>th</sup> Avenue Bridge. With few open spaces and a certain anonymity, most Cedar-Riverside residents don’t even know of its existence, let alone the larger Minneapolis and metropolitan communities.

These parks might be of greater use to the Cedar-Riverside neighborhood if they were literally “on the way” to another place residents may be going. Since this is not the case, residents can be largely unfamiliar with the locations and their resources, thus making them often of little value to many residents. This is especially problematic for Bluff Street Park, as Riverside Park does

connect to outside neighborhoods to the south by Franklin Terrace. For Bluff Street Park, accessibility may be increased in the future with the dedicated pedestrian and bike tunnel to downtown underneath Interstate 35W. Though the tunnel was built, it is currently boarded up and lacks connecting trails on the south to Bluff Street Park via a railroad right of way and to the north to South 13<sup>th</sup> Avenue. Once this connection is made, the park will be much more accessible and recognized by the Cedar-Riverside neighborhood and other area residents.

#### **4.1.7 Public Safety Concerns**

Closely related to accessibility is the issue of safety. Many residents are concerned, often well-founded, by the presence of crime in the parks. Just as a dark alley or dead-end invokes fear of personal harm and crime, so does a poorly-lit and unpopulated park. As Bluff Street and Riverside Parks are isolated, many users of the park go there specifically to be out of sight of others. This can often lead to criminal behavior in dark, quiet recesses where prying eyes cannot penetrate. As this behavior begins, it creates a reinforcing loop where legitimate users of the park avoid it, making it more hospitable to the activities they feared. It is recognized that well-lit and heavily trafficked parks give the impression of a safe environment which is visited often for the proper and desired uses. Since Bluff Street and Riverside Parks are so isolated and do not have constant levels of users and passersby, they are a prime location for undesirable activity.

## **4.2 Organizational & Governance**

The river and surrounding riverfront area is controlled by a myriad of governance authorities, ordinances, and actors. This complex system is very difficult to uncover and even more difficult to understand. Many important actors themselves do not even fully comprehend the complexity within which they operate. This situation creates a complex environment for the WBCC as it develops a comprehensive plan, as the “larger” picture must be constantly kept in mind, while local issues most dear to residents are addressed.

### **4.2.1 Prominent NRP and WBCC Divide**

Unlike all other neighborhoods in Minneapolis, the established Neighborhood Revitalization Program (NRP) operates separately from the official governing authority, the WBCC. A disconnect thus arises, in that governance issues are mostly brought to the attention of the WBCC for action, while they lack the money to take action on said issues. Conversely, NRP has the financial resources to undertake needed projects, but often lacks the authority, networks, and responsibility that the NRP possesses. This has a large impact on the parks along the Mississippi River since needed WBCC programs often lack funding to be implemented and issues often lack resources to be studied. From the bottom up, residents are likely confused as to which body they should bring their park-related concerns and questions to. From the top down, higher levels of government and authority lack a single point of contact “on the ground.” This disconnect likely partially contributes to stagnation in needed projects and attention to riverfront issues.

The relationship between the NRP and WBCC has an unfortunate and complicated history. Though improvements have been made of late, the second phase of NRP funding beginning soon will truly show whether the NRP and WBCC can successfully operate as separate but effective partners. After phase two funding is distributed, an uncertain future for community development and projects exists as the city looks to restructure how it funds neighborhoods.

#### **4.2.2 Separate WBCC Taskforces**

The WBCC created two distinct taskforces to reflect upon issues pertaining independently to Bluff Street Park and Riverside Park. Each taskforce has been instrumental in many of the successes related to each park. However, little overlap is seen between the two, meaning that issues that appear to be unique to each park are often not discovered to also be of concern to the other. For instance, pursuing historical designation for characteristics of Riverside Park will likely not be closely followed or communicated to those intimately involved with Bluff Street Park. The Taskforces operate largely independently and hold separate meetings, often inviting elected officials to their individual meetings. Recognizing this disconnect, the WBCC has created a Park Committee to oversee the natural areas of the entire neighborhood. Unfortunately, this committee is yet to be active, while the Taskforces continue to rely on informal means of communication, often at Board of Director meetings.

No central and primary contact exists within the WBCC that can speak for issues pertaining to the entire riverfront or, more generally, of the natural resources within the whole neighborhood. A synergy is lacking between the two taskforces, meaning that work and effort may often be redundant and confusing to outside groups and levels of government. Additionally, each taskforce is primarily comprised of residents with immediate proximity to their particular park, showing a structural challenge to the integration of all parks into the Cedar-Riverside community. This leads to isolated thinking about park issues that does not address the priorities and concerns of the greater neighborhood as a whole. Surprisingly little diversity on many levels exist on each taskforce, especially when considering the enormous and highly valued diversity present within the entire Cedar-Riverside neighborhood. Building diversity often requires a large amount of effort and resources. Though other components of the WBCC programming successfully reach a much larger audience, inadequate staff time and translation resources are often the limiting factors in building diverse interest.

#### **4.2.3 Difficult to Identify & Coordinate Stakeholders**

As mentioned previously, a large number of landowners exist along the riverfront, though a few control the majority of the land and have enormous clout. Additionally, just as the WBCC lacks a single point of contact, many organizations and stakeholders also have many individuals speaking on their behalf. Further complicating the governance environment, many levels of authority exist on the neighborhood, city, county, metropolitan area, state, and federal levels. This large and diverse group is very difficult to sit at the same table to discuss important issues pertaining to the overall resources presently available along the river. It also makes any future planning very difficult. This will continue to be a problem for the WBCC in the future, especially in regards to the preparation of a comprehensive plan, if it does not work diligently to create a nexus of knowledge that understands who does what, when, and where in this complex environment.

#### **4.2.4 Uncertain MRCCA Reform**

Due to feedback from stakeholders and private citizens within the MRCCA, the Minnesota Legislature is considering reform. House File 424 and Senate File 671 were introduced in the 2009 legislative session as a result of the 2008 Mississippi River Corridor Critical Area Report to the Minnesota Legislature. Specifically, the legislation calls for four major changes of consequence:

- A DNR rulemaking process is to begin no later than January 10, 2010 to address key areas of reform.
- Revision of Critical Area zoning districts and standards through rulemaking.
- Further defining of key bluff-related terminology.
- Clarification of enforcement responsibilities of the DNR and local municipalities.

This process and the debate over the exact reform of the MRCCA are likely to continue to develop over the next few years. In this dynamic environment, the development of new governance principles will complicate the creation of a comprehensive riverfront plan by the WBCC.

### **4.3 Financial**

Funding for all government services and projects is very limited in the current financial climate. Though the Cedar-Riverside neighborhood and other partners may still have strong man-power resources and community will, finances and funding will likely remain limiting factors for a considerable amount of time.

#### **4.3.1 Declining MPRB Funding**

The MPRB is the most dominant and recognized land owner along the riverfront. However, the MPRB has seen substantial reductions in funding, with more anticipated into the future. In 2003, Minneapolis reduced annual funding to MPRB by \$4.3 million and has not met other funding commitments stemming from a 2000 agreement. Additionally, the relationship between the MPRB and the City of Minneapolis has often been strained, as the Board operates as a semi-autonomous entity. The MPRB system has also lost revenue in the Cedar-Riverside neighborhood specifically due to the bridge steel still located on now unusable land on Bohemian Flats. Recognizing all of these factors, it will be very difficult for the MPRB to provide additional services or undertake new projects in conjunction with the WBCC along the riverfront, especially considering higher priorities along the riverfront in North Minneapolis.

#### **4.3.2 Underfunded NPS Priorities**

As part of the National Park Service, the area within the Corridor is eligible for certain resources, financial and otherwise. The NPS provides funding for local, regional, and state agencies to assist with the Critical Area program. In the years after the DNR assumed MRCCA administration, the NPS provided the DNR with approximately \$625,000 to assist the DNR in funding staff positions. However, the Park's local government grant program remains unfunded by Congress, removing a critical financial resource and enticement for communities to incorporate Tier II planning and management standards. The Park itself has no entrance fee, unlike all other National Parks, meaning that even fewer financial resources are available for its particular administration.

#### **4.3.3 Underutilized Alternative Resources**

The community contains many human resources which are underutilized. Though volunteer effort by residents is prominent, those that work, play, or study along the riverfront do little to contribute to planning. For instance, the University of Minnesota has thousands of students, faculty, and staff in the West Bank. The WBCC has many opportunities to partner with individual academic programs, classes, and professors in creating valuable material for the community. Also, a large amount of the population is school-aged and participates in youth

programs, many housed in Brian Coyle Community Center. There have been few efforts to date, with some exceptions, to utilize the volunteering and educational efforts of kids in increasing what projects can be accomplished in the parks.

## **4.4 Community**

### **4.4.1 Low Awareness of Resources**

Community awareness of the riverfront parks and resources is very limited. Residents within Cedar-Riverside are often acutely aware of the location and attributes of their closest park, but have little broader knowledge of the others. As mentioned previously, as the riverfront is isolated from large population centers within the neighborhood, knowledge of these assets is particularly low. Within Cedar-Riverside, little information is given in any particular park which could increase knowledge of the others. Kiosks and maps largely do not exist, which could point out other facilities along the river which were heretofore unknown. Additionally, though residents may be aware of the other parks and amenities, no educational knowledge is available on site to educate the public on the unique environmental, cultural, and historical value of the riverfront. Finally, if a resident was at one park and wished to visit another, no maps indicate preferred routes through the complex Cedar-Riverside neighborhood to the already difficult to access and remote Bluff Street and Riverside Parks and West River Parkway.

### **4.4.2 Practically No Awareness of MRCCA & MNRRA Designations**

Even amongst the most active and involved residents, many do not recognize the existence of the MRCCA and MNRRA designations and boundary, let alone understand their significance. It is particularly striking that residents of the “partnership park”, the designation given to the MNRRA by the NPS, are not aware that they, themselves, are partners with the federal government in preserving, protecting, and enhancing this unique and valuable natural resource. There is very little to indicate to residents this unique resource within which they work, live, and play. This can be complex given the untraditional nature of the Park, its endless entrances and exits, the lack of an entrance fee, and the predominance of buildings and smaller proportion of natural areas. The few visual indications of the Park are located not at the boundaries, but at heavily trafficked areas. Additionally, most signs simply show the emblem of the NPS with the Park’s name, creating much ambiguity. A comprehensive WBCC riverfront plan will be challenged to communicate the status of the Park to an otherwise largely unaware public.

## **5 Recommendations**

As the WBCC develops a comprehensive riverfront plan, some specific actions should be made to better inform the plan, as well as lay the ground work for carrying out intentions contained within. Though some of these recommendations are directly actionable and concise, others are more general in nature with open-ended means and outcomes. However, all recommendations aim to achieve the WBCC’s primary goal for the riverfront area: the development of a comprehensive riverfront plan that would maximize the impact that the Cedar-Riverside neighborhood can have on the preservation, restoration, and enhancement of the valuable natural resources on and near the river.



### **5.1 Create a Clear Riverfront Ownership Map**

With many stakeholders and landowners within the MNRRA, it is vital for the community to understand where property boundaries lie and what person or organization owns and/or controls said property. By developing a map which delineates one plot of land from another, all stakeholders can be clearly identified. Once acknowledged, the WBCC will likely have greater success in bringing together the collective group. Additionally, a map would clarify ownership of the bluff faces and related issues, such as stabilization, that a landowner may face with that property. Ideally, a map would be made by a Geographic Information System (GIS), providing a three-dimensional image with other unique property attributes directly linked.

### **5.2 Provide Park Signage and Information**

The Grand Rounds system in Minneapolis is identified by kiosks in many locations. Kiosks contain maps of the immediate vicinity, a larger overview of the system network, and information pertaining to the natural, historical, or recreational significance of the area. The WBCC should work closely with the MPRB to create and install new kiosks in well-traversed areas of Bluff Street Park, Riverside Park, and West River Parkway. These kiosks would help identify other natural areas along Cedar-Riverside's riverfront and provide a larger perspective on the importance of the area to visitors and users.

### **5.3 Further Involvement in University of Minnesota Master Planning**

As stated within the University of Minnesota Twin Cities Campus Master Plan 2009, the University seeks to "green" the West Bank with near- and long-term projects. Specifically, the University has identified Anderson Hall – directly atop a bluff – for possible demolition. Also, the fields near the Law School are slated for long-term development. Finally, general greening is a priority throughout, by the replacement or enhancement of many concrete dominated areas. WBCC should engage the Master Plan Steering Committee, Community Partnerships & Development Office, and Capital Planning and Project Management Office in these areas. Particularly, the WBCC should promote pedestrian and bike paths along the top of the bluffs during future campus planning, in an effort to better link Bluff Street and Riverside Parks through more direct access.

### **5.4 Follow "Big Projects"**

The future Central Corridor light rail line linking Minneapolis and Saint Paul is slated to begin operation in 2014. The line will run directly through the Cedar-Riverside neighborhood and the University of Minnesota along Washington Avenue, with a stop located near Cedar Avenue on the West Bank. The WBCC should be active in this project's planning, implementation, and construction, always advocating for the protection of the natural areas along the river. Also, as with many other large projects, there likely will be opportunities for smaller community enhancements. The community must look for opportunities for synergy, where the resulting construction and disturbance of the status quo can be guided to enhancement and preservation projects which may have otherwise been too large and ambitious. Particularly look for opportunities for new green space, access to the river from on top of the bluffs, and connections between parks.

This concept was put into practice when a pedestrian tunnel was created under Interstate 35W near Bluff Street Park during the reconstruction of the bridge. Without the bridge rebuilding efforts, it would have been exceedingly unlikely that a tunnel would have been created

underneath existing roadway. Though the tunnel currently lacks trail connection on both sides and is boarded up, it is the most difficult connecting component between the northwest area of Cedar-Riverside and downtown. With funding, the tunnel will likely be utilized in the future with trail connections on both sides, especially now that the most expensive component of the project has been accomplished.

### **5.5 Designate a WBCC Point Person**

The WBCC has two park-related chairs, one each for the Bluff Street Park and Riverside Park Taskforces. As each Chair communicates with parties outside of the WBCC, outsiders will likely wonder who “officially speaks” for the WBCC and community on park and riverfront issues. One person should be designated as point person for external communications, perhaps at the level of a dedicated staff person with more responsibilities and expectations than a volunteer. This individual will serve as the primary mode of contact for external communications, though not the sole contact. An important first step is to immediately synthesize the work of both taskforces. One area of particular interest is to disseminate information for one park (such as historical designation efforts) to individuals closely tied to the other. Additionally, this individual is to stay abreast of river-related developments, projects, initiatives, stakeholders, and legislation at a more macro level. Primarily, this individual would coordinate all of the WBCC’s riverfront activities and be responsible for the development of the comprehensive riverfront plan.

### **5.6 Build Community Awareness through Youth Programs**

A multitude of youth programs exist within the community. However, many are centered at Brian Coyle Community Center and Currie Park, where the neighborhood has the highest population density and youth demographic. These programs, in addition to any new ones, should strive to provide more programming along the riverfront areas. Since these existing programs may have more resources or means to transport kids, they provide an opportunity for access that children or families acting alone often lack. Additionally, making children aware first hand of the enormous value of the river and riverfront makes it more likely that this information will be passed along to their parents. Though children likely cannot convey the complexities of what the MNRRA and MRCCA mean, they can bring excitement and energy to their families about fun times and meaningful outings they had in youth programs.

### **5.7 Engage All Levels of Riverfront Governance**

The WBCC riverfront point person should build relationships with others at all levels of riverfront governance. Outreach targets should be the NPS (MNRRA), the DNR (MRCCA), the City of Minneapolis (Critical Area Plan), and the MPRB (Park ownership). Though Hennepin County does not directly govern any aspect of the riverfront corridor, it does have technical expertise, funding opportunities, and experience with other cities within its area which all can provide valuable resources of many varieties to the efforts of the WBCC. The riverfront governance truly is a cooperative effort between all the parties mentioned above and the WBCC should directly connect with each level.

### **5.8 Become Active in MRCCA Reform**

As the MRCCA reform effort continues, the WBCC should stay abreast of all developments and make their unique concerns and issues known. Community outreach is likely to be a component of the reform effort; the WBCC must make sure to “show up” and contribute when the opportunity

presents itself. Additionally, the WBCC must be proactive in engaging their local and state elected officials regarding this reform.

## **5.9 Strengthen Current Partnerships and Create New Ones**

The WBCC has made efforts recently to work with key partners, especially the MPRB, the City Council, and Friends of the Mississippi. These partnerships should be sustained and enhanced, especially through the designation of a WBCC riverfront point person. Additionally, the WBCC should build lasting ties to the University of Minnesota and Fairview-University Hospital. The River Life program at the Institute on the Environment represents one of these possibilities, as they are dedicated to the nurturing of cooperative networks. Additionally, as the NPS has a primary goal of increasing their presence on the ground within the Park, the WBCC can provide a vehicle for those efforts within the community. Continue to work closely with Friends of the Mississippi River and create ties with the burgeoning Minneapolis Riverfront Corporation.

## **5.10 Utilize Inexpensive Resources**

Many of the projects that organizations would like to undertake along the riverfront require substantial funding. This report is the product of a grant from the Center for Urban and Regional Affairs. However, just as this grant ends, so do many other funding sources. Though many volunteers have participated in riverfront activities, from Bluff Street Park plantings to Riverside Park cleanups, additional inexpensive resources can be leveraged. The WBCC should build a network of “free” help that provides analysis, technical expertise, and research.

Many students at the University of Minnesota regularly undertake projects as undergraduate and graduate requirements. At the graduate level, theses, professional papers, and capstone projects are required for graduation, all of which entail an even greater level of effort and commitment than projects undertaken within individual classes. Also, many of these projects encourage community engagement, especially through mechanisms like the Cedar Humphrey Action for Collaborative Neighborhood Engagement (CHANCE) program at the Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs. By establishing connections to administrators, professors, research centers, and institutional outreach programs, WBCC can build a network where students are encouraged, on a continual basis, to work with the Cedar-Riverside community on riverfront issues. Leveraging this academic resource provides a means to study and accomplish riverfront goals with minimal funding and time commitment by WBCC elected members.

Additionally, the University of Minnesota just established a partnership with the NPS in creating the Gopher Ranger program. Loosely based on the NPS’s Young Ranger program, university students work on projects to protect and preserve the MNRRA on or near the University campus. Recent activities have been focused on the East Bank, but many opportunities exist for outreach along the West Bank and within the Cedar-Riverside neighborhood with the WBCC’s urging.

## **5.11 Seek New Sources of Project Funding**

Many goals for the riverfront will require substantial financial resources. The WBCC should work with other partners, in addition to those already employed, to maximize their impact and locate currently unrecognized funding sources. Specifically, the NPS, the Mississippi River Fund, Hennepin County, the state’s Legacy Amendment funds, University of Minnesota and Fairview-Riverside community outreach funding, and academic and research centers at the University of Minnesota may have designated funding that is currently unknown.



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